

Nebraskans' Attitudes Toward Secondhand Smoke and Their Support for Smoking Restrictions in Public Places

Summary: Two separate studies conducted by Tobacco Free Nebraska in 2000 and 2003 show that Nebraskans are increasingly aware of the health risks associated with secondhand tobacco smoke and willing to support restrictions on smoking in public places, such as restaurants.

Background

In 2000, the Nebraska State Legislature appropriated \$21 million over the course of three years for tobacco prevention (LB1436). The funds and future programs were managed within state's Health and Human Services System by the Tobacco Free Nebraska program (TFN). *With the additional funding from LB1436, TFN established a comprehensive statewide tobacco control program that the Centers for Disease Control considers a model for other states.*¹

To obtain baseline measures of Nebraskans' tobacco behaviors and attitudes, TFN administered the Social Climate Survey (SCS) in 2000. Now, near the end of the funding commitment established by LB1436, TFN has administered a follow-up survey to gauge the success of its programs. The 2003 Adult Tobacco Survey/Social Climate Survey (2003 ATS/SCS) repeated many of the earlier measures and now serves as an essential evaluation tool for TFN. Additionally, the two surveys demonstrate trends in Nebraskans' tobacco behaviors and attitudes that can guide future public policy decision making.

Data

The 2000 SCS and 2003 ATS/SCS are statewide telephone surveys that contacted potential respondents using random digit dialing techniques. Random digit dialing

means that the numbers called are not generated from a list (e.g., a phone book). This procedure ensures that all Nebraska households with a home phone have an equal chance to be called for participation in the study, including those with unlisted numbers.

Each survey includes large sample sizes. The 2000 SCS has 2,476 respondents, and the 2003 ATS/SCS has 7,019.

Results

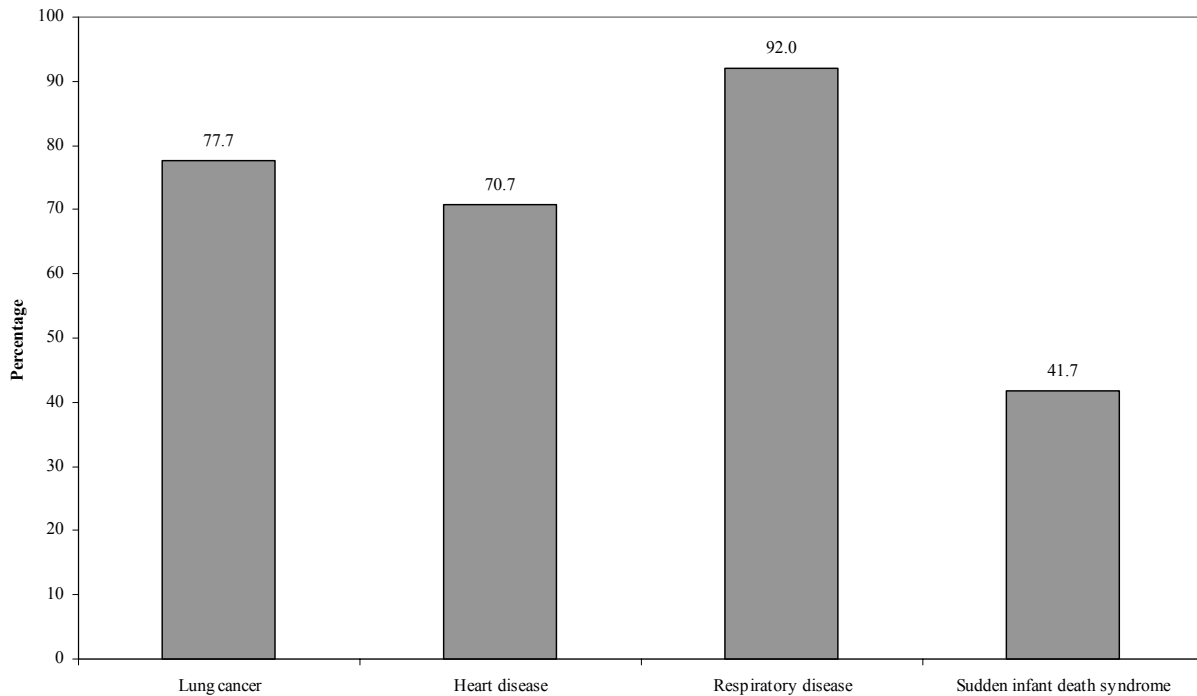
Beliefs about the health risks of secondhand smoke

When asked if inhaling smoke from a parent's cigarette harms babies and children, 90.9% agreed in 2000 and 94.1% agreed in 2003.²

There is clearly little doubt among Nebraskans that secondhand smoke is unhealthy.

The 2003 ATS/SCS included a series of questions about specific health risks associated with secondhand smoke that were not on the 2000 SCS.³ A large majority of Nebraskans agreed that exposure to secondhand smoke is associated with lung cancer (77.7%), heart disease (70.7%), and respiratory disease (92.0%). However, less than half of the respondents (41.7%) were aware that secondhand smoke is a risk factor for sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS).

Table 1. 2003 ATS - Percentage of Nebraskans who are aware that four illnesses are associated with secondhand smoke



Support for restrictions on smoking in public places

The 2000 SCS and 2003 ATS/SCS included questions regarding support for restrictions on smoking in public places. Respondents were asked if in the following places smoking should be allowed in all areas, some areas, or not at all: indoor shopping areas, convenience stores, fast food restaurants, restaurants, bars and taverns, indoor sporting events, and outdoor parks.

Nebraskans were most likely to say smoking should not be allowed at indoor sporting events in both 2000 and 2003 (81.6% and 87.2%), followed by convenience stores (80.5% and 84.7%). Nebraskans also support smoking restrictions in eating establishments. In 2003, 82.9% believed that fast-food restaurants should not allow smoking, up from 76.9% in 2000. Nearly two-thirds (65.0%) of Nebraskans agreed that restaurants should not allow smoking in 2003, while only 54.6% agreed in 2000.

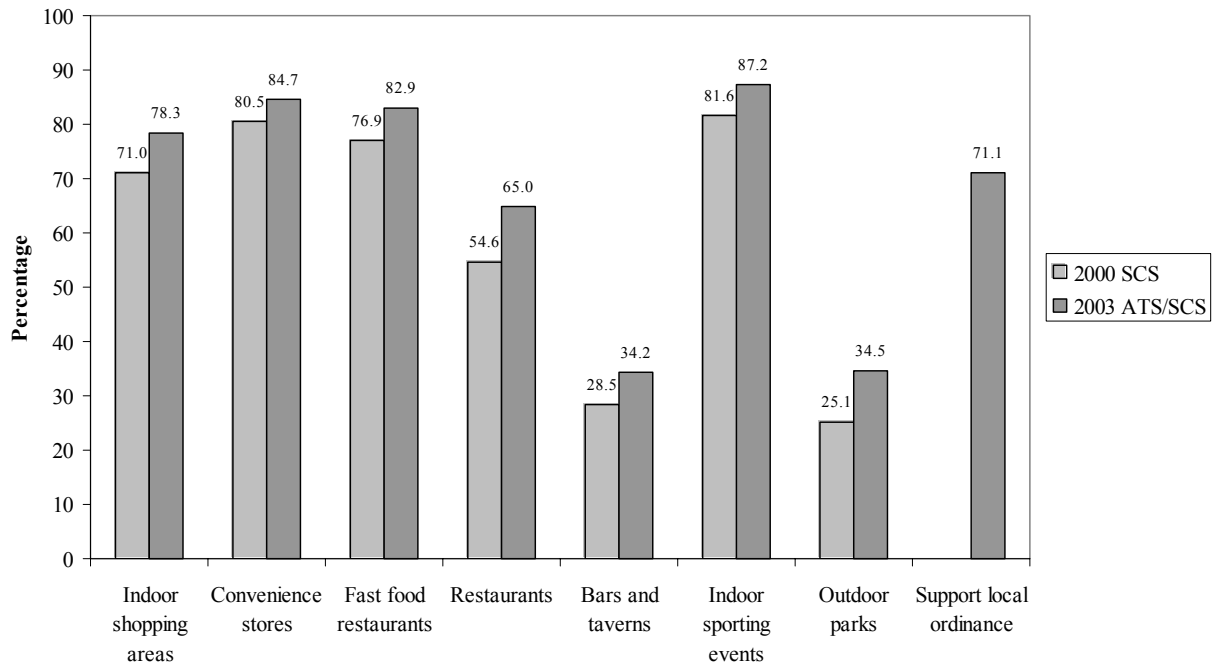
Nebraskans are least likely to support smoking bans at bars and taverns (28.5% and 34.2%) and outdoor parks (25.1% and 34.5%).

Perhaps more important than the levels of support for smoke-free public places is the trend in support levels. ***Among each of the public areas, there was a statistically significant increase in support from 2000 to 2003.*** In terms of the relative increase in support, the greatest increases are for restrictions in outdoor parks, and bars and taverns, up 37.5% and 20.0% respectively.

Support for local ordinance banning smoking in restaurants

Over the past few years, cities such as New York, Boston, Austin, and Lexington, Kentucky, have banned smoking entirely in all public establishments, including bars and restaurants. Currently, there are no cities or counties in Nebraska with comprehensive smoke-free ordinances for public places.

Table 2. Percent of Nebraskans who think that smoking should not be allowed in the following public areas



The 2003 ATS/SCS asked Nebraskans their opinions on this issue. The last column of table 2 shows that *more than seven out of ten Nebraskans (71.1%) said that they would support a local ordinance banning smoking in restaurants.*

Conclusions

2000 marked an important year for tobacco prevention in Nebraska. With a substantial investment by the state legislature, Tobacco Free Nebraska worked to inform the state's residents about the dangers of smoking and the health risks associated with exposure to secondhand smoke.

Evidence from the 2000 SCS and 2003 ATS/SCS suggests these efforts have been successful. Nebraskans are now more aware of the general health risks of secondhand smoke and more are knowledgeable about specific diseases linked to secondhand smoke.

In addition to greater awareness of the health risks of secondhand smoke, Nebraskans are increasingly supportive of smoke-free public places. It is not possible to say with certainty that the former caused the latter, but it is highly probable that, as Nebraskans become more aware of the health implications of secondhand smoke, they will become more supportive of public policies that ensure clean air.

¹ <http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/exemplary/tobacco.htm>

² The increase from 2000 to 2003 is statistically significant.

³ For more information about the health risks associated with exposure to secondhand smoke, please refer to the United States Environmental Protection Agency Web site (<http://www.epa.gov/smokefree/healthrisks.html>).

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